

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 079068

FOL NEW DELHI 4288 SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO BOMBAY CALCUTTA
MADRAS MAR 17, 1978 REPEATED TO YOU QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 4288

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: TECH, IN, US

SUBJECT: INDO-US NUCLEAR RELATIONS

REF: (A) NEW DELHI 4128; (B) NEW DELHI 4166

1. WE ARE SENDING BY SEPTTEL THE VERBATIM TEXT OF A HARSH
EDITORIAL ON INDO-US NUCLEAR RELATIONS WHICH APPEARED IN THIS
MORNING'S "TIMES OF INDIA." THE EDITORIAL WAS PROMPTED BY
THE RECENT EXCHANGE IN THE PARLIAMENTARY CONSULTATIVE COMMIT-
TEE ON ATOMIC ENERGY (REFTELS). IT COMMENDS THE GOI FOR SERV-
ING NOTICE THAT IT WILL CLAIM "ABSOLUTE TITLE" TO TARAPUR
SPENT FUELD IF THE US "AT ANY STAGE" REPUDIATES ITS AGREEMENT
TO SUPPLY ENRICHED URANIUM DURING THE LIFETIME OF THE STATION.
IN THE TOI'S FAVORABLE VIEW, "THIS WILL PAVE THE WAY FOR
TAKING TARAPUR OUT OF THE SAFEGUARDS SYSTEM ALTOGETHER."

2. WE DO NOT CONSIDER THIS ASSESSMENT WARRANTED ON THE BASIS
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OF WHAT DESAI IS SAID TO HAVE TOLD THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMIT-
TEE. AS WE HAVE REPORTED, THE PM TOOK A CONCILIATORY LINE,
EXPRESSING THE HOPE THAT HE WOULD BE ABLE TO SORT THINGS
OUT IN WASHINGTON AND, ACCORDING TO THE "STATESMAN" CORRES-
PONDENT, TELLING THE MP WHO HAD SPARKED THE QUESTIONING THAT
HE WOULD CONSIDER THAT THE US HAD REPUDIATED THE AGREEMENT
ONLY WHEN PRESIDENT CARTER TOLD HIM IT HAD. A COUPLE OF PAPERS

HAVE INTERPRETED HIS STATEMENT ABOUT INDIAN RETENTION OF TITLE TO THE SPENT FUEL FOLLOWING US "REPUDIATION" OF THE AGREEMENT TO MEAN THAT INDIA WOULD BE FREE TO REPROCESS THIS FUEL. WE ARE NOT AT ALL CONVINCED THAT THE PM HAS COME TO ANY SUCH CONCLUSION. (UNDER THE AGREEMENT, THE GOI RETAINS TITLE TO THE FUEL.)

3. AT THE SAME TIME, THE EXPRESSION OF PARLIAMENTARY CONCERN, THE WAY THE PM REPORTEDLY RESPONDED, AND THE REACTION NOW APPEARING IN THE PRESS, ALL SERVE TO HIGHLIGHT THE PROBLEM OF MAINTAINING SAFEGUARDS OVER TARAPUR FOLLOWING WHAT COULD BE INTERPRETED HERE AS THE BREAKING OF THE AGREEMENT BY THE US. THIS EMBASSY AND WASHINGTON HAVE LONG RECOGNIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS PROBLEM, AND THERE IS NOTHING SURPRISING ABOUT ITS BECOMING MORE VISIBLE IN THE WAKE OF THE SIGNING OF THE NON-PROLIFERATION LEGISLATION AND AT A TIME WHEN XSNM-1060 REMAINS STALLED AT THE NRC. OBVIOUSLY, OUR STRATEGY IN DEALING WITH THE CONSEQUENCES OF AN EVENTUAL PARTING OF THE INDO-US NUCLEAR WAYS MUST TAKE MAJOR ACCOUNT OF THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE GOI MAY UNDER THOSE CIRCUMSTANCES MOVE TOWARD REPROCESSING, AND SHOULD BE DESIGNED TO HEAD IT OFF.

4. IN PUBLISHING ITS TOUGH EDITORIAL, THE "TIMES OF INDIA" -- PROBABLY THE HARDEST LINING OF MAJOR INDIAN PAPERS ON THE NUCLEAR ISSUE -- IS ENGAGING IN THE FAMILIAR GAME OF ATTRIBUTING TO THE GOI THE APPROACH IT ITSELF ADVOCATES, EXPECTING IN CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT WAY TO MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO FOLLOW ANY OTHER LINE. WE SHOULD ON OUR SIDE DO WHAT WE CAN TO PERSUADE THE PM NOT TO PLAY INTO THEIR HANDS NOR TO FORECLOSE IN ADVANCE OTHER POSSIBLE OPTIONS. GOHEEN UNQUOTE VANCE

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